

BOOK REVIEWS

Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database, 3d ed. Compiled and edited by Jeff M. Jellin, Philip Gregory, Forrest Batz, Kathy Hitchen, Stephen Burson, Kay Shaver, and Kimberly Palacios. Stockton, CA: Therapeutic Research, 2000. 1,530 p. \$92.00. ISBN 0-9676136-4-7. Web version, \$92.00, both versions \$132. ©

The *Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database*, one of the most comprehensive and reliable natural medicine resources available, is by Therapeutic Research Faculty, an impressive team of experts. Natural medicines in this context refer to all herbal and non-herbal supplements. Although some of the supplements may not be produced from natural sources, they are included, because they are generally categorized with natural products.

The authors' main goal is to create an objective, reliable, scientifically investigated database, including some evidence-based natural medicines for use by health care professionals and patients. The data and consensus of scientific information on natural medicines has been used to create both the database and the book. The authors support the concept that the more informed health professionals are about natural medicines, the better advice they can give to patients.

The trend to make complementary and alternative medicine part of the medical school curriculum is evident in a series of articles published in a recent issue of the journal *Academic Medicine* [1–5]. Marcus [6] discusses reasons for the critical need to teach medical stu-

dents and residents about complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Frenkel and Arye [7] state "Medical schools and residency programs are starting to respond to this demand. . . . physicians should become informed consultants, and be able to provide educated advice about CAM to their patients and help them integrate any CAM therapies shown to be safe and effective into their health-care." Talalay and Talalay [8] strongly advocate the importance of using scientific principles to develop medical agents from plants. The *Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database* is an excellent reference resource that meets the need for educating health care professionals who want to become knowledgeable advisers about natural medicines to their patients.

The main part of the publication is arranged alphabetically by names of products. There are fifteen categories of information under each named product, when available. These fifteen categories of information are designed to help address the questions and challenges health practitioners encounter most often during patient care. The information is concise and accessible. Each product is carefully researched and includes references for further study. The second part of the book numerically lists the full citations of the 8,304 references. The third section provides brand names of natural products and their contents. The fourth section offers charts with data on clinically significant potential interactions between drugs and commonly used natural medicines. The last section is an index that contains extensive cross-references.

Although the book is derived from the database, the Web version is updated daily, while the book's content is limited by the publication date and rapidly becomes outdated. More brand names and products are listed in the Web version than the book. For example, in-

formation on dogwood and dogwood bark are available in the database but do not appear in the book. The Web version is also more flexible to use than the book version. The useful linking capability is only available in the database. By clicking on the "Show Me Brand Names that Contain this Ingredient" button, users can quickly access a list of hyperlinked brand names. For example, eighty-four brand names can be retrieved for the natural medicine dang gui, a search that would take a considerable amount of time using the book. Users can also obtain a list of all references cited for a natural medicine by clicking on the "Show Me References" button. The Web references are linked to the National Library of Medicine's PubMed database, when available. Users not only can read abstracts but also access more related articles in similar topics.

Continuing education/continuing medical education (CE/CME) credit for health professionals is available online. Pharmacists, physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and dietitians can complete the fully accredited self-study courses from the Internet site.

One enhancement missing from the database is images. By adding images or illustrations of ingredients or brand name products, the Internet site could provide an added value service to users.

This reviewer highly recommends the Web version of this product as a reference resource for all types of libraries. Its contents are comprehensive, data are scientifically researched and updated daily, references are readily available and hyperlinked, and, most importantly, the site is very easy to navigate.

Both individual subscription and site license options are available. Those interested should visit the Website (www.naturaldatabase.com) for more details.

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5. TALALAY P, TALALAY P. The importance of using scientific principles in the development of medicinal agents from plants. *Acad Med* 2001 Mar;76(3): 238-47.
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7. FRENKEL, op. cit.
8. TALALAY, op. cit.